News release

Staring into the abyss

26 January 2005

How much more does the climate have to change before it becomes 'dangerous'?

The Met Office's Hadley Centre for Climate Prediction and Research in Exeter is hosting an international scientific meeting from 1-3 February 2005, to discuss how to answer this question and others. The Hadley Centre carries out extensive research on climate, and today has published a report outlining some of the key aspects of their work in the build-up to the conference.

One way of defining dangerous change would be the onset of a rapid change in the climate system. Might we get to a point where we are committed to the Gulf Stream switching off, the Greenland ice sheet melting, trees not being able to absorb any more of our carbon dioxide, or vast amounts of methane being released from the oceans? These possibilities are explored in the report, together with some of the implications of a more gradual change in climate.

Once a dangerous level of change - say in terms of global temperature rise - has been decided, we then have to estimate what this implies for the level at which we would need to stabilise greenhouse gas concentrations in the atmosphere, and - in turn - how this level would restrict 'allowable' emissions from human activities. Some of the issues we face in carrying out these steps are also outlined.

Director of climate prediction at the Hadley Centre, Dr Dave Griggs, says: "We are pleased to be hosting this important scientific meeting here in Exeter next week. Some of our recent research will be presented in papers at the meeting, and this short report shows the wider range of scientific work undertaken here which can and does inform policymakers and politicians".

The research at the Hadley Centre is funded largely under contract to Defra.

The report is published as a PDF document. Hard copies will be available from Monday 31 January 2005.

Download Avoiding dangerous climate change brochure (PDF, 889 kb)

Avoiding Dangerous Climate Change Conference web site

For further information:
Met Office Press Office +44 (0)1392 886655
E-mail: pressoffice@metoffice.gov.uk

Met Office Customer Centre 0870 900 0100
If you're outside the UK +44 (0)1392 885680

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